

DORA COMMUNITY
(Town of Dora)
Birmingham Industrial District
Walker County Rd. 81, 5 miles
West of US 78
Dora
Walker County
Alabama

HAER No. AL-99

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
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(Town of Dora)

HAER No. AL-99

Location: Walker County 81, 5 miles west of U.S. 78, Dora, Walker County, Alabama.

Owners: Multiple private

Date of Construction: 1886-1910s

Project Information: This report is based on written documentation donated by the Birmingham Historical Society, reformatted to HABS/HAER guidelines.

Significance: This mining boomtown and railroad distribution center represents the importance of the Warrior Coal Fields to the Birmingham District. While communities of this type once flourished throughout the District, few intact examples remain. Dora contains a brick commercial strip, a fine jail, a railroad tunnel and turn of the century residences of prosperous miners, and remains as one of the most intact examples of this type of community in the District. A WPA gymnasium, now the Alabama Mining Museum, also contains artifacts and collections that document the history of coal mining throughout the Birmingham District.

Condition: Today, intensive strip mining continues in the area and the railroad runs through the heart of the community, but commercial activity now centers around U.S. 78. In old Dora, the once-prosperous row of brick commercial buildings remains. The Alabama Mining Museum, located close by, actively collects records and artifacts of the area and the District's mining heritage. Few buildings are used and most are deteriorating. The roadway is overgrown.

DESCRIPTION

The "Old" Dora commercial district lies along Walker County 81 to the south of and parallel to the elevated and curving tracks of the Frisco (now Burlington Northern) Railroad. A retaining wall, buttressing the commercial area from the tracks, forms the northern edge of the commercial district. Along the south side stands a silent row of turn-of-the-century brick commercial buildings of one and two-story scale. Among the buildings remaining are the bank, masonic building, several stores, and a church. Located on the road behind and parallel to the commercial strip is a 15' X 30' X 15' massive jail built of sandstone blocks by the WPA. Foundations for the Frisco Depot, the heartbeat of the former mining community, remain. Most buildings in the district are currently abandoned. The roadway is overgrown with weeds.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In 1886, when the Frisco Railroad constructed tracks through this section of the Warrior Coal Fields, the town of Dora was known as Sharon. Upon completion of the tracks, it became Sharon-by-the-Railroad. A few years later, town residents renamed the community Horse Creek, after the Horse Creek Coal Company, then the most active coal mining company in the area. However, in 1906, because of confusion with so many "creek" towns in the surrounding coal fields (Blue Creek, Short Creek, and Lost Creek) the community was named Dora in honor of Dora Morgan, a mine owner's wife.

Dora became one of the largest mining centers in the Warrior Coal Fields. By 1910, eight coal companies were operating in the hills and hollows about the town. As many as 14 trains a day passed through the town on the Frisco and Illinois Central Railroads, which formed the spine of the rural community. For many years, rails provided the only access to the community. Trains not only brought in goods and services but also transported miners to their work. In 1910, 15 general merchandise stores, a meat market, livery, bottling company, lumber yard, contracting, furniture and undertaking firms, a baker, jeweler, tailor, two milliners, a dentist, three physicians, a lawyer and two justices of the peace constituted the economic base of the Dora mining boomtown. Population was listed at 800. The Pleasanton and Ivy Hotels, Shipp and Green's Restaurant, and the Dora Banking and Trust Company, of which H. F. Crawford was president, served many additional coal miners and their families who lived in surrounding company camps. By the 1920s and 1930s, the prosperous mining community boasted an automobile sales agency and a movie house.

Sources Consulted

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- Field Visits with Eddie Key, Alabama Mining Museum, 2/15/91